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News Release

Staying Safer at School: Playground Inspection Shows How

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Each year, more than 2,300 children are injured on public school playgrounds in Utah. That is enough students to fill 100 average elementary school classrooms. In response, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH), Salt Lake Valley Health Department (SLVHD), and Safe Kids Utah held a playground safety inspection to highlight common hazards and ways to keep kids active and safe on playgrounds. Governor Gary R. Herbert has also declared April 26-30, 2010 as Playground Safety Week in Utah.

“Most of the common safety hazards we see on playgrounds are the result of everyday use and wear and tear over time,” said Greg Langfeld, Environmental Health Specialist with the SLVHD. “Common hazards we look for include inadequate surfaces beneath playground equipment, loose nuts and bolts, cracked slides, and worn swings.”

At Calvin Smith Elementary in Taylorsville, Principal JoAnn Crawley has taken an active role in keeping her students healthy and safe. “It’s important that my students stay physically active and have safe playground equipment to use,” said Crawley. “My staff and I inspect the playground equipment on a regular basis. Our playground supervisors look for potential problems and enforce playground rules to make sure students don’t get hurt.”

Data from the UDOH Student Injury Reporting System showed that, from 2005-2008:

- 70.5% of elementary school injuries occurred on the playground or playfield.
- More playground injuries occurred during 5th grade than any other grade.
- Two-thirds (65.2%) of elementary school injuries occurred during recess. The most common activities during which injuries occurred were playing on bars (20.7%), running (18.0%), and walking (11%).

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- Falls were the cause of 30.7% of all playground injuries, followed by tripping or slipping (26.9%) and collisions (21.3%).
- The top five injuries received included possible fracture/broken bone, cut/laceration, bump/bruise/contusion, sprain/strain/tear, and possible concussion.

To keep playgrounds safe, the UDOH recommends schools:

- Enforce playground safety rules (such as no pushing, crowding, or shoving).
- Develop a playground inspection and equipment maintenance checklist.
- Schedule regular inspections.
- Promptly repair broken playground equipment.
- Always have trained adult supervisors present when children are using playground equipment.

Injury hazards don't just exist on school playgrounds. "Parents can play a huge role in keeping their kids safe on public playgrounds just by supervising their child while they are using the equipment," said Langfeld. "If someone is concerned about a safety hazard at a public playground, the issue should be reported to the parks and recreation department in that area."

Visit <http://health.utah.gov/vipp/schoolInjuries/PlaygroundSafety.html> for inspection checklists, a list of proper surfacing materials, and other tips on keeping playgrounds safe.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care and promoting healthy lifestyles.